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AUTHOR Jackson, Elaine E.
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ABSTRACT

In October of 1983, Austin Independent School District secondary students (n=1275) completed a Youth Needs Survey (YNS) representing a 16 percent return of the original sample. Because the countywide Social Policy Advisory Committee was using the YNS results for planning, it was decided to use a high school student questionnaire (Questions for Students) to determine if the responses on the YNS had any relation to possible responses of a true random sample of students. From eight of the YNS scale sets it was possible to choose one item that could be used on a districtwide survey, without first acquiring parental permission. These were among the least personally sensitive items, but had been previously correlated with the other items. These items were randomly assigned to about 1,400 high school students each, and each student had one or two items included with other vocational course and job-need questions. Students were promised anonymity on non-course related choices, and the rate of responses was consistent across all items. While the YNS student sample differed from the District, the results indicate that most teenagers' attitudes and opinions are strongly influenced by their common membership in the school system. (PN)

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HOW BIASED IS A SELF-SELECTED SAMPLE?

Elaine E. Jackson

Office of Research and Evaluation
Austin Independent School District
6100 Guadalupe
Austin, Texas 78752

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HOW BIASED IS A SELF-SELECTED SAMPLE?

Last year the Office of Research and Evaluation had a unique opportunity to look at a project for which we had firmly predicted disaster, and prove that disaster had in fact occurred. Attachment A is the executive summary of our reports on the Youth Needs Survey, to which only 16% of a selected random sample had responded. A disclaimer figured large in the report on the survey: the sample is not considered representative, and we don't really want to talk much about the results. The survey was part of a community effort, we did the best we could, and those who wanted to use the information would have to accept that the results were of unknown quality.

The Youth Needs Survey was conducted in October 1983, and in January 1984 we found that we were now going to survey all the District's high school students on vocational course choices and job needs. Attachment B is the summary report for the districtwide survey, Questions for Students.

Because the District had spent time and money on the Youth Needs Survey (YNS), and because the countywide Social Policy Advisory Committee (SPAC) was using its results for planning, we decided to use the high school student questionnaire to find out whether the responses on the YNS has any relation to possible responses of a true random sample of students.

The authors of the YNS had given instructions for deriving 11 scale scores, each from about 10 highly corrolated items. From eight of the scale sets we were able to choose one item that could be used on a districtwide survey, without first acquiring parental permission. These were among the least personally sensitive items, but had been corrolated by the authors with the other items. These items were randomly assigned to about 1,400 high students each, and each student had one or two of these items included with other vocational course and job-need questions on his/her survey. Students were promised anonymity on the items not related to course choices, and the rate of responses was consistant across all items.

The YNS sample of students differed form the District as a whole (and

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from a true random sample) in several important ways. The YNS sample included:

More girls,
Fewer minority students,
Fewer students from low income families, and
More students from college-educated families.

The following table shows the eight items used, and the responses of the high school YNS sample and the districtwide random sample. Items 1 and 6 indicate less absolute adherance to truth and minimally less respect for the law for the higher socio-economic status group, item 3 shows higher educational goals, and item 2 may combine with these to indicate a more pragmatic approach among the higher SES students. Items 4 - 8 however, show agreement on job prospects, self- and parental esteem, and control.

There are differences. We do not advocate treating a 16% return rate from a random sample as gospel. We do not generalize that <u>all</u> the items would show as much similarity. We do however believe that these results give some credence to what most parents and teachers of high school students would report: conformity is the name of the game, and whether they absolutely believe the same things, most teenagers' attitudes and opinions are strongly influenced by their common membership in the school system.

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YOUTH NEEDS SURVEY
ITEMS INCLUDED ON
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT SURVEY

ITEM	HS STUDENTS ON YNS	HIGH SCHOOL SURVEY
1. One should always tell the truth, regardless of what one's friends think of him.		
Strongly Disagree	4%	2%
Disagree	31%	10%
Agree	48%	56%
Strongly Agree	17%	32%
2. One problem with the world today is that most people don't believe in anything.		
Strongly Disagree	6%	10%
Disagree	28%	45%
Agree	51%	37%
Strongly Agree	15%	9%
3. How far would you <u>like</u> to go in school?		
Only until I can legally drop out	1%	1%
Graduate from high school	7%	19%
Some college (academic, trade, or vocational)	12%	15%
Graduate from college	45%	42%
Post-graduate education (med., law, or grad.school)	33%	24%
Other	3%	-
4. What are the chances of a young person in this city getting a good paying,honest job?		
Poor	19%	14%
Fair	58%	65%
Good	23%	21%
5. (How often do you) feel satisfied with youyself?		
Never	4%	2%
Sometimes	29%	33%
Often	48%	47%
Always	19%	18%
6. The members of my group feel that laws are good and should be obeyed.		
No	10%	5%
Don't know	34%	36%
Yes	56%	59%
7. (How often do you feel) your parents really care about you?		
Never	4%	2%
Sometimes	6%	11%
Often	11%	21%
Always	79%	65%
8. Most of the time, do you feel you can change what might happen tomorrow by what you do today?		
No	18%	20%
Yes	82%	79%

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth Needs Survey

In October 1983, 1275 AISD secondary students completed a survey of their needs for social services. The survey was approved by the Board of Trustees in response to a request by the Social Policy Advisory Committee (SPAC).

The purpose of the survey was to aid the SPAC in planning social services to meet the needs of youth in Austin and Travis County.

Because the questions covered topics such as drugs, sex, and law abidance in addition to peer and parental support, both students and parents had to sign a letter of approval before the student was invited to complete the survey. This self-selected sample is not considered truly representative of the entire AISD student population.

The 335 survey questions took from 30 minutes to over an hour for students to complete. The administration dates were October 19-24, 1983.

Description of the Sample

7,989 Letters mailed home to randomly selected parents/students
1,735 Agreements to participate received by deadline
169 Agreements to participate received after deadline
953 Refusals to participate received

1,735 Surveys sent to schools
1,275 Completed surveys returned for analysis
16% of the 7,989 students in original sample
5% of the 25,059 students enrolled in grades 7-12

Percentage of Students in . . .

	Initial Sample of 7,989	Final Sample of 1,275
Male	50%	46%
Female	50%	54%
Black	17%	11%
Hispanic	23%	13%
Anglo/Other	60%	76%
Grade 7	17%	18%
8	16%	19%
9	17%	15%
10	16%	15%
11	16%	16%
12	18%	17%

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Results

The 335 items provided an enormous amount of information. Overall, these students displayed a positive outlook on life, school, and their futures. Ninety-five percent of the students believe:

- They have an equal or better chance to get an education, and
- They have an equal or better chance to get the jobs they want.

Sixty percent believe their chances to make it in life are getting better.

On the less positive side, 53% of these students reported that teachers not understanding them has been a problem. Also, 53% thought students not having a say in how schools are run has been a problem. Parents not understanding kids' problems has been a problem for 41%. Whether these attitudes have changed over the years is not known.

Complete results, including breakdowns for high school and junior high school students, are contained in the full report Youth Needs Survey, Fall 1983 (ORE publication number 83.37).

Reactions

The nature of the Youth Needs Survey made it somewhat controversial. However, the number of questions raised by parents or students and the level of concern expressed by them and school staff were quite low. However, the participation rate (16% of those students invited) was also low. Three main concerns were expressed by parents and students in phone calls and written comments to explain the low participation rate.

- The schools have no right to know about such personal matters.
- The survey did not justify missing valuable class time.
- The survey responses by individual students cannot be kept confidential.

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QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

This year ORE conducted our first districtwide survey of high school students. We had three major aims:

- To get student input on questions of concern to the District as a whole,
- To provide vocational counselors with vocational course interests of students, and in some cases replace local vocational interest surveys, and
- To furnish employment-needs information for the American-Statesman's Hire a Kid efforts.

The survey was coordinated in the schools by the vocational counselors, and administered by advisory, first-, or second-period teachers. The questionnaires were printed on scannable forms with the students' and teachers' names. Every student who was present on the day the survey was administered was surveyed, and the scannable form allowed us to handle the 11,000 survey forms efficiently, and return information to vocational counselors much faster than usual. The vocational course information was distributed to vocational counselors with students' names included, but names were removed from the data tape before the other items were analyzed.

Results

Student responses indicated that AISD high school students are highly job oriented:

- 85% have held a job for pay,
- 95% were interested in jobs for summer, 1984,
- 85% may choose to take vocational courses during the fall semester,
- 50% were working during the spring semester, an average of 16 hours a week, and
- 60% were interested in vocational courses involving on-the-job training.

Despite this orientation, however, two thirds of the students want to graduate from college or complete post-college education. Only 20% want to stop going to school with high school graduation.

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